

Transcript of Remarks by Reagan and Wiesel at White House Ceremony

Following is a transcript of remarks yesterday by President Reagan and Elie Wiesel, chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, after Mr. Wiesel received the Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement at the White House, as recorded by The New York Times:

Reagan's Remarks

Jewish people have just finished celebrating Passover, the holiday that marks the exodus from Egypt, the deliverance from slavery. But this week, we commemorate a non-deliverance, a time when exodus was refused, when the doors of refuge were closed and in their place came death. In the Passover narrative, the Haggadah, there is the phrase, "In every generation, they rise up against us to annihilate us." In the generation of the Holocaust, that annihilation nearly succeeded in Europe. Six million murdered, among them over a million children.

How does life continue in the face of this crime against humanity?

The survivors swore their oath, "Never again." And the American people also made that pledge, "Never again," and we've kept it. We kept it when we supported the establishment of the state of Israel, the refuge that the Jewish people lacked during the Holocaust, the dream of generations, the sure sign of God's hand in history. America will never waver in our support for that nation to which our ties of faith are unbreakable. To say "Never again," however, is not enough. When with Israel the United States reached out to help save Ethiopian Jewry we were also fulfilling our pledge. This was truly God's work.

The Future of Soviet Jewry

Today, we work on and on to help Soviet Jewry, which suffers from persecution, intimidation and imprisonment within Soviet borders. We will never relinquish our hope for their freedom and we will never cease to work for it. If the Soviet Union truly wants peace, truly wants friendship, then let them release Anatoly Shcharansky and free Soviet Jewry.

But our pledge was more than "Never again." It was also "Never forget." And we've kept that pledge, too. We kept that pledge when we established the Holocaust Memorial Commission and set the cornerstone for its museum. We kept that pledge when in our colleges and universities we teach each new generation of Americans the story of the Holocaust. And in our lives we keep that pledge when we privately in our own families and in our hearts remember.

From the ashes of the Holocaust

emerged the miracle of Israel and another miracle — that the survivors began life again. They came to new lands, many to Israel and many, thank God, to America. They built new families and with each child gave us the greatest symbol of this faith in the future. They brought to us the eloquence of a people who, in surviving such suffering, asked only for the right to remember and be remembered. A people who did not permit themselves to descend into the pits of and quagmires of hatred but lifted themselves instead, and with them all of humankind, out of darkness, upward to a time when hatred is no more and all nations and all people are as one.

A Sharing of Grief

We who had not suffered the tragedy of the Holocaust directly shared their grief and mourned for their victims. We too prayed for a better future and a better world where all peoples and all nations would come together in peace and defense of humanity.

Today, there is a spirit of reconciliation between the peoples of the allied nations and the peoples of Germany and even between the soldiers who fought each other on the battlefields of Europe. That spirit must grow and be strengthened. As the people of Europe rebuilt their shattered lands, the survivors rebuilt their shattered lives, and they did so despite the searing pain. And who are their fellow citizens have taken up their memories and tried to learn from them what we must do.

No one has taught us more than Elie Wiesel.

His life stands as a symbol. His life is testimony to the human spirit endures and prevails. Memory can fail us, for it can fade as the generations change. But Elie Wiesel has helped make the memory of the Holocaust eternal by preserving the story of the six million Jews in his works. Like the prophets whose words guide us to this day, his works will teach humanity timeless lessons. He teaches about despair, but also about hope. He teaches about our capacity to do evil, but also about the possibility of courage and resistance and about our capacity to sacrifice for a higher good. He teaches about death, but in the end he teaches about life.

Elie, we present you with this medal as an expression of our gratitude for your life's work.

In honoring Elie Wiesel, we thank him for a life that's dedicated to others. We pledge that he will never forget or that we will never forget that in many places in the world the cancer of anti-Semitism still exists. Beyond our fervent hopes and our an-

guished remembrance we must not forget our duty to those who perished, our duty to bring justice to those who perpetrated unspeakable deeds. And we must take action to root out the vestiges of anti-Semitism in America, to quash the violence-prone or hate groups even before they can spread their venom and destruction.

And let all of us, Jew and non-Jew alike, pledge ourselves today to the life of the Jewish dream, to a time when war is no more, when all nations live in peace, when each man, woman and child lives in the dignity that God intended.

On behalf of your fellow citizens, now let me sign this proclamation commemorating Jewish Heritage Week.

Wiesel's Remarks

Mr. President, speaking of the conciliation, I was very pleased that we met before, so a stage of the conciliation has been set in motion between us. But then, we were never on two sides. We were on the same side. We were always on the side of justice, always on the side of memory, against the SS and against what they represent.

It was good talking to you, and I am grateful to you for the medal. But this medal is not mine alone. It belongs to all those who remember what SS killers have done to their victims.

It was given to me by the American people for my writings, teaching and for my testimony. When I write, I feel my invisible teachers standing over my shoulders, reading my words and judging their veracity. And while I feel responsible for the living, I feel equally responsible to the dead. Their memory dwells in my memory.

Alone in an Orphaned World

Forty years ago, a young man awoke, and he found himself an orphan in an orphaned world. What have I learned in the last 40 years? Small things. I learned the perils of language and those of silence. I learned that in extreme situations when human lives and dignity are at stake, neutrality is a sin. It helps the killers, not the victims. I learned the meaning of solitude, Mr. President. We were alone, desperately alone.

Today is April 19, and April 19, 1943, the Warsaw Ghetto rose in arms against the onslaught of the Nazis. They were so few and so young and so helpless. And nobody came to their help. And they had to fight what was then the mightiest legion in Europe. Every underground received help except the Jewish underground. And yet they managed to fight and resist and push back those Nazis and yet their complicity for six weeks. And yet the

leaders of the free world, Mr. President, knew everything and did so little, or nothing, or at least nothing specifically to save Jewish children from death. You spoke of Jewish children, Mr. President. One million Jewish children perished. If I spent my entire life reciting their names, I would die before finishing the task.

Fragility of Human Condition

Mr. President, I have seen children, I have seen them being thrown in the flames alive. Words, they die on my lips. So I have learned, I have learned, I have learned the fragility of the human condition.

And I am reminded of a great moral essayist. The gentle and forceful Abe Rosenthal, having visited Auschwitz, once wrote an extraordinary reportage about the persecution of Jews, and he called it, "Forgive them not, Father, for they knew what they did."

I have learned that the Holocaust was a unique and uniquely Jewish event, albeit with universal implications. Not all victims were Jews. But all Jews were victims. I have learned the danger of indifference, the crime of indifference. For the opposite of love, I have learned, is not hate, but indifference. Jews were killed by the enemy but betrayed by their so-called allies, who found political reasons to justify their indifference or passivity.

But I have also learned that suffering confers no privileges. It all depends what one does with it. And this is why survivors, of whom you spoke, Mr. President, have tried to teach their contemporaries how to build on their ruins, how to invent hope in a world that offers none, how to proclaim faith to a generation that has seen it shamed and mutilated. And I believe, we believe, that memory is the answer, perhaps the only answer.

A few days ago, on the anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald, all of us, Americans, watched with dismay and anger as the Soviet Union and East Germany distorted both past and present history.

Mr. President, I was there. I was there when American liberators arrived. And they gave us back our lives. And what I felt for them then nourishes me to the end of my days and will do so. If you only knew what we tried to do with them then. We who were so weak that we couldn't carry our own lives, we tried to carry them in triumph.

Mr. President, we are grateful to the American Army for liberating us. We are grateful to this country, the greatest democracy in the world, the freest nation in the world, the moral nation, the authority in the world. And we are grateful, especially, to this country for having offered us

haven and refuge, and grateful to its leadership for being so friendly to Israel.

And, Mr. President, do you know that the Ambassador of Israel, who sits next to you, who is my friend, and has been for so many years, is himself a survivor? And if you knew all the causes we fought together for the last 30 years, you should be prouder of him. And we are proud of him.

Support for Israel

And we are grateful, of course, to Israel. We are eternally grateful to Israel for existing. We needed Israel in 1948 as we need it now. And we are grateful to Congress for its continuous philosophy of humanitarianism and compassion for the underprivileged.

And as for yourself, Mr. President, we are so grateful to you for being a friend of the Jewish people, for trying to help the oppressed Jews in the Soviet Union. And to do whatever we can to save Shcharansky and Abe Stolar and Isosif Begun and Sakharov and all the dissidents who need freedom. And of course, we thank you for your support of the Jewish state of Israel.

But, Mr. President, I wouldn't be the person I am, and you wouldn't respect me for what I am, if I were not to tell you also of the sadness that is in my heart for what happened during the last week. And I am sure that you, too, are sad for the same reasons.

What can I do? I belong to a traumatized generation. And to us, as to you, symbols are important. And furthermore, following our ancient tradition, and we are speaking about Jewish heritage, our tradition commands us "to speak truth to power."

So may I speak to you, Mr. President, with respect and admiration, of the events that happened?

We have that four or five times. And each time I came away enriched, for I know of your commitment to humanity.

And therefore I am convinced, as you have told us earlier when we spoke, that you were not aware of the presence of SS graves in the Bitburg cemetery. Of course you didn't know. But now we all are aware.

Your Place Is With the Victims

May I, Mr. President, if it's possible at all, implore you to do something else, to find a way, to find another way, another site? That place, Mr. President, is not your place. Your place is with the victims of the SS.

Oh, we know there are political and strategic reasons, but this issue, as all issues related to that awesome event, transcends politics and diplomacy.

The issue here is not politics, but

good and evil. And we must never confuse them.

For I have seen the SS at work. And I have seen their victims. They were my friends. They were my parents.

Mr. President, there was a degree of suffering and loneliness in the concentration camps that defies imagination. Cut off from the world with no refuge anywhere, sons watched helplessly their fathers being beaten to death. Mothers watched their children die of hunger. And then there was Mengele and his selections. Terror, fear, isolation, torture, gas chambers, flames, flames rising to the heavens.

But, Mr. President, I know and I understand, we all do, that you seek reconciliation. And so do I, so do we. And I too wish to attain true reconciliation with the German people. I do not believe in collective guilt, nor in collective responsibility. Only the killers were guilty. Their sons and daughters are not.

And I believe, Mr. President, that we can and we must work together with them and with all people. And we must work to bring peace and understanding to a tormented world that, as you know, is still awaiting redemption.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Kirkpatrick Appears to Differ With Reagan on Nazi Soldiers

Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick was honored by a group of Jewish leaders in Manhattan yesterday and seemed to join in their criticism of President Reagan for likening German soldiers killed in World War II to the inmates of Nazi concentration camps.

"The fact is that we are not all equally guilty, we are not all equally victims," Dr. Kirkpatrick said at a luncheon of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations at the Pierre Hotel.

Dr. Kirkpatrick, who until recently was President Reagan's chief delegate to the United Nations, did not mention the President by name.

She clearly took issue with those who would forget the Holocaust.

"It was not until my four years at the United Nations that I understood the extent to which the drama of the Holocaust — the victimization of the Jewish people — continues to this very day," she said. "Having learned that lesson, I believe of course that all of us never forget it."

Dr. Kirkpatrick was honored for being "a strong voice" in support of Israel at the United Nations.

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